



REI's new prototype in Boulder is designed to serve as a green laboratory.



Photo: Benny Chan, Followworks, Los Angeles

# Portal to the great outdoors

REI debuts a new progressively green prototype in Boulder, Colo.

By Jessie Bove, Associate Editor

Opened in October 2007, REI's new prototype store in Boulder, Colo., is not the outdoor retail co-op's first foray into sustainable design. In fact, Seattle-based REI, also known as Recreational Equipment Inc., has been pioneering the way in green design for more than a decade, beginning with the opening of its Seattle flagship in 1996. In 2004, REI's Portland, Ore., loca-

tion became the first retail store in the country to earn the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED gold rating for commercial interiors. Its new Boulder store, which is expected to receive a LEED silver rating for commercial interiors, is also involved in the LEED for Retail pilot project.

When the co-op chose Boulder as the location for its

new 42,000-sq.-ft. prototype, they had a no easy feat ahead of them. "If you want to talk about a tough crowd, that's Boulder—they're hardcore," says Ted Jacobs, design principal for San Francisco-based design firm Gensler, which worked on the project with REI's in-house team. But it is Boulder's discerning citizens that make the city a great place to test new prototypes. "If you can survive there and be authentic and believable, you're doing okay," Jacobs says.

Dedicated to inspiring, educating and outfitting its members since its inception in 1938, REI has long been devoted to environmental stewardship, and a portion of its profits is set aside each year to support conservation and outdoor recreation nonprofits and causes. The co-op works to protect the spaces—such as rivers, forests, etc.—in which its members recreate, and plans to someday be a climate-neutral company. "We want to make sure that all those things people recreate with are there 50 and 100 years from now," says Megan Behrbaum, public affairs manager of REI. "As a business, we recognize that the ways we do business impact the planet—so green building is one of the ways we hope to be mindful of the planet's resources."

The prototype was constructed by remodeling the company's existing Boulder store that opened in 2002. By expanding into a vacant space adjacent to the store, the larger footprint allowed a wider selection of gear and apparel, and the addition of a new ski and snowboard department, repair shop and children's play area. The design team wanted to create an environment that would give the products an opportunity to shine and stand in the foreground. "We definitely were trying to step up the look and feel to be more on par with the quality of our products," says Doug Ludlow, store development project manager for REI. "So it might come off as a little bit more modern and quite different than a typical store, but a part of that is being innovative in our use of materials and finishes, and trying to leverage the whole green component of our brand."

One of the challenges in designing the prototype to



Left: A glass-enclosed community room (shown from the exterior) serves as the focal point of the store.

Right: More than 30 custom fixtures were created for the prototype.

be commensurate with the high quality of its products was the sheer amount of merchandise, as well as the differentiation of those products—from 10-ft. kayaks down to inch-long bicycle parts. Ann Fine Patterson, visual merchandising director for REI, cites the design of a "pack pantry," for backpacks as one of the innovative solutions that was created for difficult-to-merchandise products. More than 30 custom fixtures were created for the Boulder store, many incorporating sustainable features. Patterson also says cross merchandising is a new aspect of the design, which allows REI to showcase its hardgoods and softgoods in a more organized and accessible manner.

Another design goal was to deliver a flagship-like experience in a more replicable and affordable format, taking the best things REI has to offer and working them into a standard store that the co-op could reproduce easily. "REI has these great flagship stores and they're huge, grand expressions of the brand, but those aren't something that you can roll out," Jacobs explains. "So that was our project, to really reflect the 98 percent of existing stores in the new stores that are going to be rolled out."

Gensler looked at the project holistically, from the display of products to the service model to the green components to imparting the brand story within the space itself. "One of the things we felt was very much under-leveraged was this notion of community," Jacobs says. The entire store rotates around an elevated, 2,000-sq.-ft. community room, which acts as a focal point and hub, with the rest of the store radiating out like spokes. "We've taken what is traditionally a small room in the back of the store or possibly a portion of our warehouse that we used for clinics, presentations, classes and things, and brought that up front and center in this new prototype," Ludlow notes. Glass walls surround the room to maintain a visual connection between the shoppable area and the community center.

Overall, the design scheme is meant to be reminiscent of nature. However, Jacobs explains that they

were very careful not to mimic nature, but rather, be evocative of it, extending from the interior design elements to the exterior architecture. The façade incorporates visual cues of forest treetops, earthen strata and a pinnacle.

Designed as a working laboratory to analyze the performance of green building features and new retail concepts, the Boulder store is filled with sustainable materials and innovations in green design. Three solar strategies—passive solar, solar thermal and solar electric—were incorporated into the design. Saving more than 20 percent in energy costs, Solatubes channel natural daylight throughout the store, while store lighting automatically dims or turns off during the day. A glass skylight, or light monitor, lets light in while collecting energy to power the store through embedded silicon solar cells, called building integrated photovoltaics (BIPV). It is the first installation of BIPV of its kind in a retail environment. A solar hot water system meets 70

percent of the store's hot water needs, which is supplied through efficient plumbing fixtures. Green materials, such as bamboo, recycled rubber and cork, have been incorporated throughout the store on the floor, perimeter walls, fixtures, displays, benches and tabletops. Finishes, paints, primers and carpeting all emit low- to no-VOCs (volatile organic compounds). The store, which also utilizes wind power, diverted 75 percent of its construction waste, by either using it in other areas of the store or recycling it.

REI plans to proceed with green building as it opens stores in 2008 and beyond. The co-op will unveil a second prototype store in Round Rock, Texas, in the fall of 2008. "When we talk about sustainability, yesterday's definition was 'taking as little away as possible.' But that's not the goal of REI or Gensler. The goal is to give back," Jacobs says. "The sustainable techniques that are being pushed forward are doing just that." [ddi](http://www.ddimagine.com)

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## project file

**Recreational Equipment Inc. (REI)**  
Boulder, Colo.

**IN-HOUSE DESIGN TEAM**

**REI Store Development**  
Kent, Wash.

**ARCHITECT**

**Gensler**  
San Francisco  
Ted Jacobs, design principal  
Ray Shick, principal  
Zofia Kondor, project manager  
Bill Nelson, project architect  
Karen Skolin, job captain/project manager  
Daniel Gonzales, job captain  
Vivian Volz, specifier

**GENERAL CONTRACTOR**

**Westwood Contractors Inc.**  
Tacoma, Wash.  
Greg Anderson, vice president  
West Coast division

**MEP ENGINEER**

**Glumac**  
San Francisco

**STRUCTURAL ENGINEER**

**KPFF**  
San Francisco

**LIGHTING DESIGNER**

**Architecture & Light**  
San Francisco

**SOLAR POWER & RENEWABLE ENERGY**

**Solar Design Associates Inc.**  
San Francisco

**FLOORING: HARD SURFACE**

**Gammapar**

Forest, Va.

**Expanco**

Coatesville, Pa.

**Armstrong**

Lancaster, Pa.

**FLOORING: SOFT SURFACE**

**Milliken**

La Grange, Ga.

**CEILING SYSTEMS**

**Armstrong**

Lancaster, Pa.

**Tectum**

Newark, Ohio

**LIGHTING**

**Lithonia**

Conyers, Ga.

**Amerlux**

Fairfield, N.J.

**Finelite**

Union City, Calif.

**Delray**

Butte, Calif.

**Peerlite**

San Francisco

**FIXTURES**

**Leggett & Platt Store Fixtures Group, Design Fabricators Branch**

Thornton, Colo.

**Kirel USA**

San Diego

**Smith & Fong**

San Francisco

**Avonite**

Florence, K.Y.

**FURNITURE**

**Numark**

Bellevue, Wash.

**Arthur Gordon Associates**

New York

**MILLWORK**

**Parker Commercial Construction Inc.**

Boulder, Colo.

**PAINT FINISHES**

**Kwal Paint**

Denver

**PLASTIC LAMINATES**

**Formica**

Cincinnati

**METALS, GLASS & SPECIAL FINISHES**

**Husker Glass & Decochem**

Omaha, Neb.

**Harmon Inc.**

Eden Prairie, Minn.

**WALL COVERINGS**

**Stromberg**

Greenville, Texas

**SOUND SYSTEMS**

**Tempest Technologies**

Helena, Mont.

**SIGNING/GRAPHICS**

**REI Store Development**

Kent, Wash.

Information in the Project File is provided by the retailer and/or design firm.